

## UPDATING DERRYBERRY'S PRIORITIES AND THE ROLE OF HEALTH EDUCATION

I suggest that the priority health issue articulated by Derryberry<sup>1</sup> in 1954 needs expansion in consideration of contemporary world affairs. Derryberry saw chronic diseases as “[t]he health problems of greatest significance today” and says that “[h]ealth education and health educators [should] be expected to contribute to the reduction of the negative impact of such major health problems.”<sup>1(p368)</sup>

In this age of violence and weapons of mass destruction, the health field with special reference to health education and health promotion (HEHP) should also give priority to reducing the premature mortality, unnecessary morbidity, and suffering associated with forms of inflicted or “horrendous death.”<sup>2–4</sup> The umbrella term “horrendous death” comprises 2 types of death, both caused by people and thus preventable. One type is characterized by the motivation to kill others and include deaths resulting from war, terrorism, homicide, genocide, intentional starvation, poverty, and environmental assaults. In the second type, the motivation to kill others is absent; examples are unintentional injuries, environmental degradation, smoking (arguably), and other drug use.

At least 4 forms of horrendous death make its prevention of the greatest importance: war and terrorism using weapons of mass destruction, with special reference to thermonuclear devices; environmental assault and degradation; mass hunger and starvation; and genocide. Appropriate tasks for HEHP would be to educate students and others on the threat and risk of horrendous death, predisposing factors, and root causes. These root causes include economic deprivation and exploitation, such as joblessness, poor education, lack of human rights (with special reference to women), population growth, sense of hopelessness, and, most important, poor communication between and understanding of different cultures, particularly with regard to language and religion—and the negative, deadly effects of corporatism and aspects of globalization. Advocacy, along with education, should be part of HEHP's responsibility.

The prevention of horrendous death is not a goal that is foreign to the American Public Health Association (APHA). APHA's recent leadership (e.g., Barry Levy, Victor Sidel, Quentin Young), sections and caucuses (e.g., the International Health Section, the Peace Caucus, and the Socialist Caucus), and APHA policy statements reflect this view.<sup>5,6</sup> To my knowledge, the HEHP professional organizations have shown little leadership in recognizing horrendous death as a health problem of concern. ■

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